

**Neurodiversity Movement and Rational Demand  
Avoidance: The clash of 2 competing biopower  
technologies in action**

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# Neurodiversity Movement and Rational Demand Avoidance: The clash of 2 competing biopower technologies in action.

Richard Woods.  
18<sup>th</sup> of July 2018.

# BIAS.

## My Bias.

- The presenter meets the RDA profile.
- The presenter is a RDA sceptic, significantly more compelling research supporting RDA.
- Rational Demand Avoidance (RDA) (Milton 2017; Woods, Forthcoming).

# DISCLAIMER.

## Disclaimer.

- After reflection this content is different to the submitted abstract.
- *“If you think you understand Foucault, you do not understand Foucault”*, Gill Loomes.
- Based on United Kingdom Neurodiversity movement and RDA supporters.

# BIOPOWER TECHNOLOGY.

## The nature of power.

- Subtle and is everywhere.
- Comes with resistance and knowledge.
- Technology used to control (Foucault 1978).
- SEND Code of Practice is an example (Burch 2018; Lehane 2017).
- Different stakeholders can use different technologies.

# POWER OF DIFFERENCE.

## Neurodiversity.

- Autism & other impairments are natural human differences (Arnold 2017).
- Stakeholders: Autistics persons.
- Agenda: De-pathologising of autism (Chown and Leatherland 2018).

# POWER OF DIFFERENCE.

## Neurodiversity.

- Tends to be offered for free: conferences, journals and autism show.
- Does sell books.
- Strength in knowledge, epistemically in theory and research.
- Critical Autism Studies.
- Weaknesses: Power differentials and tokenism.

# POWER OF DEFICITS.

## Rational Demand Avoidance.

- Newson in 1980 (Gillberg 2014), modern traits are:
- Consistent resistance to every day demands.
- Demand avoidance can use social strategies.
- Ease at role play and pretend.
- Lability of mood and impulsivity due to need for control.
- Obsessive behaviour.
- Surface sociability that lacks social identity /pride/ shame (Green et al 2018).



# POWER OF DEFICITS.

## Rational Demand Avoidance.

- Stakeholders: Clinicians, charities and parents.
- Agenda: RDA recognised officially as part of ASD (Christie et al 2012; Russell 2018).
- Strengths: Organisation, power differentials & motivation.
- Weakness: Conflict of interests (Woods 2017) & extreme position.
- Conferences, books & work training.
- Articles can be open access (O’Nions et al 2016).

# STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES.

## Neurodiversity Movement.

- No central body co-ordinating & ad-hoc.
- Participatory Autism Research Collective.
- *Autonomy, the Critical Journal of Interdisciplinary Autism Studies.*
- Autscope.
- National Autistic Taskforce.
- Dependent on external help.

# STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES.

## Rational Demand Avoidance.

- Co-ordinated and organised structures.
- PDA Development Group.
- National Autistic Society.
- PDA Society.
- National PDA Campaign.
- Social Media pages.
- Are independent of external support.
- Blurred boundaries and conflict of interests.

# CLASHING TECHNOLOGIES.

## Rational Avoidant ableism.

**Ableism:** *“a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability is cast as a diminished state of being human”* (Campbell 2008).

# CLASHING TECHNOLOGIES.

## Rational Avoidant ableism.

- RDA is contrasted against autism stereotypes:
- Intense emotions and dysregulation.
- Superficial Theory of Mind.
- Manipulates others.
- Need for control.
- Roleplay and fantasy.
- Dislikes routines.
- Likes novelty.
- Makes eye contact(Christie 2007; Newson et al 2003).
- Female form of autism (Gould and Ashton-Smith 2011).

# CLASHING TECHNOLOGIES.

## Why not try self-stigma?

- Self-stigma: Awareness, agreeing and application.
- Self-esteem and self-efficacy.
- Avoiding evidence based practices.
- Can be countered with positive group identity (Corrigan et al 2009).

# CLASHING TECHNOLOGIES.

## Why not try self-stigma?

- RDA's pathologising discourse.
- Low self-esteem 73% (Russell 2018).
- PDA by PDAers (Cat 2018).
- Applicable to RDA carers.

# CLASHING TECHNOLOGIES.

## Internalised Ableism.

- Complaints.
- Name calling.
- Secret documents.
- Sally Cat's recent petition.



# CLASHING TECHNOLOGIES.

## Internalised Ableism.

- Power is knowledge (Flyvbjerg 2001).
- Keeps autistic persons divided.
- Mercy of disability of charities (Oliver 2013).
- Diverting research interest from community wishes (Woods 2017).

# ASSIMILATION.

## Whose Neurodiversity?

- RDA supporters using neurodiversity.
- Is it the same as ours?
- Neurodiversity appropriation?
- If so, does this matter?

# COPY CATS?

## Areas of cross-pollination.

- Rational Demand Avoidance and de-pathologising language.
- Pedagogy research using RDA strategies (Woods, Forthcoming).
- Autistic demand avoidance behaviour research (Woods 2018).
- Development of RDA theory using autistic theory (Milton 2018).
- Full support for all autistic persons.
- Ethical debate is crucial for this.

# COPY CATS?

## Neurodiversity Mobilisation.

- RDA advocates are organised and effective.
- Neurodiversity movement could copy this model.
- Would take collective decision.
- Avoid conflict of interests.

# ANY QUESTIONS.

## The End Game.

- Contact Details:  
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- Twitter handle:
- @Richard\_Autism
- My blog, Rational Demand Avoidance:  
<https://rationaldemandavoidance.com/>
- Any questions?

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